

Featured Mental Health Initiative

Middle Level Rise and Shine K to 8 Kindness Club

Keswick Valley Memorial School (Burtts Corner, NB)

Background

The school is a rural Kindergarten-grade 8 school with a population of 215 students. The school has a group of caring community members who support initiatives such as food for the breakfast program and clothing for students in need. Many of the students' parents get home late each evening due to the fact that they have to travel to work each day from the rural area to the city. This makes it difficult for students to pursue activities outside of school hours.

Promising Practice

This initiative was developed out of the belief that students need opportunities to ease into the school day before beginning their academic learning. Students also need choice in regard to how to start their day in a positive way.

Based on the data collected from a school survey, informal interviews with students, school improvement planning information, and voice from the parent committees, it was evident that students at the school needed more opportunities to participate in activities during school hours. These activities are

non-academic interventions that help develop pro-social behaviours by supporting the interests of students and creating a different connection to school staff and their school.

To encourage students to participate in new activities and activities that they enjoy, the school day starts with students participating in an activity of their choice for 20 minutes. Many students spend this time in the gym playing badminton, orbit ball, tag games, and four-corner soccer. These activities are additional, unstructured time outside of their Physical Education class. Other students participate in a morning art program, while others have social time with friends.



In addition to the Rise and Shine initiative, the school has also implemented the Kindness Club. This is time in the morning to organize kind acts throughout the day that make small waves of change throughout the school. For example, *kind word cards* are created and distributed to younger students. These actions are creating student connectedness to the school and celebrating student voice. The Kindness Club has one weekly Kindergarten-grade 8 activity where younger students team up with an older buddy to spread some acts of kindness through the school. When students feel good about what they are doing, they spread those positive feelings to the staff and other students throughout the school day.

Impact

Since the Rise and Shine and Kindness Club initiatives have been implemented, negative morning behaviours have decreased in number as have the number of students being sent to the office due to behaviour. Students reported an increase in school connectedness and that the Rise and Shine and Kindness Club was a better way to start their day versus an academic intervention.

Sustainability

This program is embedded in the school day so it allows for flexibility. All students participate in the activity of their choice and pre and data and attendance is collected. The program is data-driven but supported by teachers and administration. The school is able to sustain the program financially using the equipment and space that is available at the school.

Modifications

Here are suggestions to modify this approach for different learning environments.

- Encourage students who always engage in the art program to try something new and engage in physical activities and vice versa.
- Encourage students to participate in a *Random Act of Kindness Challenge* within the community where they initiate a random act of kindness and report back to their classmates what they did, how they did it, and the impact that they made.

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